

Intellectual Resistance to Extremism in Pakistan: A Historical Discourse (25-04-15)

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore and analyze the genesis and dynamics of extremism in Pakistan, phenomena which can have serious political implications for South Asia. While analyzing the evolution and growth of extremism in Pakistan, the underlying hypothesis of this paper is that Pakistani society as a whole, more specifically, its intellectuals, displayed strong resistance to extremism preached or practiced by any group or individual. Intellectuals from west Punjab, no less than those from other provinces and areas of Pakistan, were always in the forefront in all such political phases or instances. A general study of the times and literary works of Shah Hussain, Bullah Shah, Habib Jalib, Munir Niazi et al, will clearly reflect that throughout history, the Punjabi poets have never endorsed acts which might endanger human life and always stood up against violence and extremism. For them, human existence was not about hatred or violence. Instead, they always emphasised on unconditional love for humanity as a whole irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Keywords: Extremism, Punjabi Poetry, Mysticism, Religion, Habib Jalib.

Introduction

A brief historical sweep of this phenomena in contemporary times especially with regards to Muslims is in order.

We would necessarily have to go back in time to events when this state of affairs began to take shape. A brief bird's eye view of the subcontinent's history is thus in order before we deal with the biased and mostly one-sided coverage of the contemporary events which the media loves to dish out, coverage that forms the main source for so-called intellectual and enlightened views of the moment.

There was a well-spread out, geographically speaking, and a bitter struggle between the West and the Muslims, and peoples of South America and Africa, mostly non-Muslims, stretching from late fifteenth century till the collapse of Muslim rule in Anatolia in early twentieth century. The geographical area involved in this struggle between the Muslims and the rapid western and Russian

advance on Muslim Central Asian lands was vast and included a vast variety of nationalities, tribes, cultures with a great variety of customs.

Each of the Muslim people and lands responded differently to this capture, destruction and often attempts at total annihilation, of their lifestyle, culture and even downright existence, as territories previously under control were overrun between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. After a long lull, the Muslims attempted to open their eyes and gauge the utter destruction that they had suffered. Slowly, the immense loss worldwide dawned upon them but since they had been deprived of all means of defence let alone offence, the awakening took various forms. First, there were speeches, newspaper articles, some calls for a revival of politico-armed struggle in some areas—the Murid Wars in the Caucasus, (Kin, 2008) Abd al Qadir's resistance in Algeria (Aussaresses, 2010), and many other similar instances are a good example of this aspect.

Even after the 'near-defeat' of England by Germany in both world wars, it was forced to vacate territories under its control. Although, following the World War Two, territories were given nominal independence but ruling groups and networks of loyalists to the West or Russia, depending on the areas which they controlled were left behind to act as 'resident agents' of the former colonial powers and kept up the exploitation of their newly-independent or –liberated territories for the distant political/economic/military puppet-masters.

Over a period of more than a hundred years, in the subcontinent especially, since Syed Ahmad Shaheed and Ismail Shah Shaheed's campaigns in the North-West and the War of 1857 to oust the British, after each failure there has always been a lull as Muslim groups tried to regroup and think of new strategies. After each failure, Muslims withdrew inwards but they came back with new methods but still the state apparatuses, as happened recently in the Egyptian overthrow of a fully legitimate government by Sisi and his generals under instigation from the West and its clients, have held their own. However, the Muslim freedom-fighters have resorted to 'assymetrical' warfare of all kinds and at all levels in response. Suicide bombings, though condemnable and prohibited in Islamic religion, have become simply a weapon of war by people lacking other means of fighting regularly trained and equipped armed forces.

In the last thirty years or so Muslim groups have had launched political campaigns to bring changes in their respective countries. Nearly always the collusion of corrupt local forces allied with foreign interests have been able to nullify and negate them. In these circumstances, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan proved like a matchstick on oil and although foreign interests tried to use them for their own goals, Muslim fighters had their own independent agenda which was not to be dented under any circumstances.

Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a spark has been lit throughout the Muslim world and just as those governments of the world which wield enormous influence in world affairs through their creation and control of UN and other world-wide organizations, the Muslims have developed their own system to help

Muslim fighting groups in other nations. This has posed an existential threat to the existing 'world order', its members have tried all means to discredit these Muslims as 'terrorists', who themselves have no respect for anybody's life or property as can be seen from dozens of Muslim countries they have invaded, destroyed killing countless people. Such slogans, accompanied by many incidents of Muslim vs non-Muslim confrontations in the West itself, where Muslims have settled in many countries, have caught on and an overwhelming number of Muslims ranging from Chechnya, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq and a host of other countries have started to move to such hot-points from all over the world.

There has been a massive literature on various topics related to extremism in Pakistan. (Amir, 2004). Extremism is a very recent phenomenon in Pakistan and it is certainly incorrect to say that either the state itself in a major way or its allied groups in major or decisive ways are its sponsors at any level. In fact, it is the product of multiple factors, including the events of 9/11, which have contributed to the unpleasant state of affairs thus far resulting in the deaths of approximately fifty thousand people in Pakistan, with great damage to peoples' property and harm to the overall peace and tranquillity of the country. This paper would attempt to show that extremist activities have never been endorsed either by Pakistani state or its society (Faur, 2011). The intellectuals of Pakistan have resisted this extremism through their poetry and writings and have continued to preach the lessons of mutual love, peace and fraternity. As a result, despite the claim of some of the extremist groups that they are trying to rid the country of Western influence, the people as a whole neither back them nor do they endorse extremism as a tool to solve their socio-political problems. The people of Pakistan would rather follow the teaching of Quran, Sunnah and the Sufis. For a better understanding of this phenomenon, an open debate can help trace the reasons for extremism and recommend courses of action for its eradication. Therefore, the need of the time is to carry out a comprehensive study of this phenomenon by focusing on its historical discourse (Roy, 1994).

Punjab and Terrorism

Once a land of great mystics and poets, in the Punjab, a province of Pakistan, no communal or sectarian riots had occurred thanks to the sayings, writings and lyrics of mystics and poets. Nineteenth century poet Bullah Shah expresses his commitment to sufi teachings of Sulh-e-kul (love for all and hatred for none):

”ہندو نہ نہیں مسلمان
بھئے نرنجن تچ ابھیمان
سنی نہ نہیں ہم شیعہ
”صلح گل کا مرگ لیا

But unfortunately this land of Punjab is experiencing the challenging task of countering extremism. Broadly speaking, extremism in its theory and manifestation in religious forms was propped up during the Zia era (1977-1988) (Nasar, 2004). Being an active sympathizer of the Tablighii Jamaat, he set out to

Islamicize the legal, political and social structures of the country. Zia's policy of lending support to the Islamic religious parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), facilitated their penetration into state institutions (Nasr, 1994). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan's decision to fight a proxy war for the United States and its allies spelled doom for Pakistan's internal stability and in reality endangered its future survival. The West specially the US in connivance with the then Government of Zia successfully campaigned for a 'Global Jihad' against Communism which was well received by the youngsters in Muslim society (Cohen, 1992). Therefore, Pakistan not only became the battleground for regional but also superpower politics (Bahadur, 1995). Habib Jalib, a truly people's poet, writes:

*"Amrika se mang na bhik
Mat kar logon ki tazhik
Rok na janhoori tehrik
Chhod na azadi ki rah
Pakistan ka matlab hai kya
La Ilaha Illallah"...* (Jalib)

The West financially sponsored the establishment of Madrassas in Pakistan with this aim that these Madrassas would provide them with those young men who will be willing and trained to fight the Jihad, popularly known as Taliban. They infused the spirit of Jihad that became the central theme in the ideological training of these Mujahideen. Its natural consequence was the birth of a new radical Islamic movement. Nineteenth century poet Bullah Shah pointed out the negative role of Ulema in the society. He held them responsible for misguiding the Muslims masses. He says:

پڑھ پڑھ شیخ مشائخ کہاویں
الٹے مسئلے گھروں بناویں
بے عقلان نوں لٹ لٹ کہاویں
الٹے سدھے کریں قرار
علموں بس کریں او یار

پڑھ پڑھ نفل نماز گزاریں
اچیاں بانگیاں چانگیاں ماریں
منبر تے چڑھو عظیم پکاریں
کیتا تینوں حرص خوار
"علموں بس کریں او یار"

After the end of Afghan war, the Mujahideen were left alone as both Pakistan and American had withdrawn their military and political involvement in Afghanistan. The collapse of the Soviet Union contributed to Islamic militancy. Since then the Mujahidin's diverted its attention towards the Palestine issue and other issues concerning their liberty. In this connection, they established Al-Qaida, an international network to liberate the Muslim world.

The critics blame that in its eagerness to gain ‘strategic depth’ and energy corridor through Central Asia, Pakistan ventured to establish a client regime in Afghanistan with Pashtun domination. In fact, this adventure brought the battle to its own home-ground. Above all, the tragedy of 9/11 put Pakistan in an extremely awkward position as the US now actively wanted to target the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Government of Pakistan under Musharraf had to adjust its policies to the changing perceptions and policies of some of the leading military and economic powers whom it could only stand up to at its own peril. Muneer Niazi (Niazi & Suhail, 1996). another Pakistani Punjab poet portrays this phenomenon with these words:

“Kuj onj vi rahwa okhya san kuj ghla wich ghama da tog vi si,
Kuj shahr de log vi zalim san kuj sun maran da shok vi si,”

“Bahut mein ne suni hai aap ki taqdeer Maulana
Magar badli nahin ab tak meri taqdeer Maulana
Khudara Shukr ki talqeen apne pass hi rakhen
Yeh lagti hai mere seene pe ban kar teer Maulana
Nahin mein bol sakta jhuut is darja dhitali se
Yehi hai jurm mera aur yehi taqdeer Maulana
Haqeeqat ka kya hai, yeh to aap jaanen ya Khuda jane
Suna hai Jimmi Carter hai aap ka peer Maulana
Zameenen hon waderon ki, mashinen hon luteron ki
Khuda ne likh ke di hai yeh tumhen terhrir Maulana
Karodon kyon nahin mil kar Falastin ke liye ladte
Dua hi se faqat kat-ti nahin zanjir Maulana”

Pakistan was forced to adopt a difficult new course of action which was not acceptable to some domestic and many international forces/groups. Economic downturn, inflation, unemployment and strong doubts also helped to raise the level of opposition amongst many groups which accompanied this sudden change in policy amongst those who were literally, overnight, without consultation, left wondering about the harm to the country’s internal and foreign and global interests. It must be stated that the new policies adopted by the Musharraf government in Pakistan led to politicians being targeted by some groups and Benazir Bhutto became the first high-profile politician to fall a victim to such violence; (Hussain, 2010) Musharraf himself too was targeted a couple of times. Under pressure from America, Musharraf had announced a nationwide clampdown on some activist political outfits in January 2002, but the inconsistent steps bore little fruit except in the form of a backlash. His attempts to bring his supporters in the army to the top were also not very successful and reflected the drawbacks of too sudden changes in the arena of policy matters at all levels. The Red Mosque Movement (2007) which erupted in Islamabad, was a clear indication of the dangers of such a course of action.

One view-point of the critics is that the state of Pakistan itself had a rich historical legacy of its socio-cultural and religious traditions (Alavi, 1987). The genesis of such an expression were found in the Objectives Resolution in 1949, where the state was involved in setting the its future course towards the realization of a truly Islamic Republic based on the principles of fair-play, justice and equality for all. (Haqqani, 2005)

However, two cataclysmic events which upset the Cold War power dynamics and concurrently affecting the South Asian region were the Iranian Revolution and the Afghan War in 1979 (Faruki & Eposito, 1987). These two events, both of which still garner tremendous attention in the region but also globally, directly affected the political and ideological thought processes in Pakistan.¹ Habib Jalib, although a strongly left-leaning poet of Pakistan, was critical of role of Ulema in supporting the then Government. He says in a poem by name Maulana:

*“Bahut mein ne suni hai aap ki taqreer Maulana
Magar badli nahin ab tak meri taqdeer Maulana
Khudara Shukr ki talqeen apne pass hi rakhen
Yeh lagti hai mere seene pe ban kar teer Maulana
Nahin mein bol sakta jhuut is darja dhitai se
Yehi hai jurm mera aur yehi taqsis Maulana
Haqeeqat ka kya hai, yeh to aap jaanen ya Khuda jane
Suna hai Jimmi Carter hai aap ka peer Maulana
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In fact, in Pakistan, these events caused serious consequence in shape of the Shia-Sunni divide, which helped in shaping the sectarian differences following a mushrooming of some extreme-oriented sectarian outfits which led to some serious incidents at times.²

Once the seeds of extremism were sown it flourished and continued to grow during the successive regimes of General Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari (Devadas, 2007) their tendency towards a more militant expression of their beliefs for achievement of their political goals became an increasing threat for the governments as these groups enjoyed their own access to corridors of power as well. (Arif, 2010)

Conclusion

Pakistan is a progressive Islamic state. Thus, the rise of extremism in any form must always be taken as a serious threat to its ideology. Extremism is a new phenomenon in the history of Pakistan which crept into the society owing to numerous factors including poverty and illiteracy. However, the history of Pakistan also proves that while the State might have shown complacency at times, but where, in the society overall, many groups especially the intellectuals, resisted

against any aggression whether it was on part of individual or from any unrelated groups or sects. Our society never endorsed extremism, as a serviceable tool for achieving any goal by any group but instead they wrote and spoke actively against it.

Notes

1. "Too long I have heard you preach and prate, Maulana But so far there has been no change in my fate, Maulana Keep to yourself your preachings of gratefulness My heart, like an arrow, they penetrate, Maulana The truth, only you know or God knows They say that Jimmy Carter is your pir* incarnate, Maulana The land to the landlords, the machine to the despoilers This, according to you, is God's dictate, Maulana Why don't millions fight for Palestine Prayers alone cannot from chains liberate, Maulana"
2. Habib Jalib writes: "The Mother The children were shot dead, The mother, in fury, said These pieces of my heart Should cry and I stand apart Looking on from afar This I cannot do I should look on from afar As the tyrants, night and day With the blood of my children Holi play Besmirched in red As the children were shot dead The mother, in fury, said These pieces of my heart Should cry and I stand apart Looking on from afar This, I cannot do"
3. Habib Jalib's stress on better relations between India and Pakistan and hold the third party responsible for their division. "Hindustan belongs to me and Pakistan belongs to me Both of these, however, are under American hegemony American aid gave us wheat, as also their deceit, Do not ask me how long we've suffered their conceit, And yet the bayonets are all around this flowering valley. Hindustan belongs to me and Pakistan belongs to me, Khan Bahadur, do not follow the English, from them better keep away, Once again they are holding you by the collar, you are still their prey, Macmillan was never thine, Kennedy can never be, Hindustan belongs to me and Pakistan belongs to me, This land in fact, my dear, belongs to peasants and workers, Here will not run the writ of a few clannish marauders The dawn of freedom is heralding the end of tyranny Hindustan belongs to me and Pakistan belongs to me".

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